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THE MAY-DAY FESTIVAL

SYMPOSIUM

Even to city children spring comes with some measure of exuberance and the less the city offers the more we as teachers need to cherish spring's meaning and its essential beauty. With somewhat this conviction the May Day celebration has grown up in the Francis W. Parker School and it is one of the loveliest of all the whole round year.

Bits of the old English festival we keep in a Lord-of-the-May, and a May Queen to whom, as on the village green in old England, the children of the school offer poems and songs and dances which they have composed in her honor. Our Queen is chosen from among those senior girls who have grown up in the school. The entire school votes, children and faculty, and the choice is based not on physical beauty but on the friendliness, the outgoingness and the ultimate quality which makes her beloved by all of us. It is an honor far greater than the old village choice.

Because May Day is close to Commencement the school takes this occasion to express good wishes for the Senior Class while the Class in turn plants a tree or bush or vine to leave with us. Each grade in the school writes a wish to the Seniors and these are read, then the papers are burned and the ashes planted with the class offering.

Through many years the ceremony has grown from one of much informality and slight organization into a coherent, semi-dramatic form, and crude speeches made by children and teachers have been replaced by bits from Milton, Spencer, and Shakespeare.

Ease and simple charm is brought into the exercises by expert handling of rehearsals, of processions and stage pictures. The part of it which is "spontaneous" in the sense of being left without training or direction has been abandoned. The outcome of many years of working to free our children for expression has brought us a sense of the necessity for a right balance between spontaneity and conscious direction. We give the children not only occasion and stimulus, but we provide the kind of training which they need in order to express themselves in the best possible way at any given time. We have lost some of our fear of interfering with their freedom of expression because we can now recognize surely the difference between a technique which frees and an imposed formalism in expression.¹

From the day of the first robin's note or the day the first snow-drop is found in the leaves children and teachers begin to say "May Day is coming, we must get ready our offerings for the Queen." Always and everywhere spring has awakened the godlike in man, and it is surprising how a clump of crocus, a handkerchief-sized patch of scilla in bloom, a mere day of warm sunshine does put spring into the veins so that children are impelled to write and dance and sing. Appropriate things

¹ "The Creative Aspect of a May Day Festival" by Helen Goodrich, *Progressive Education Magazine* (Jan.-Feb.-Mar., 1927), pp. 35-38.

done at other times of the year are freely used as the song quoted here, made by the third grade when their calla lily bulb bloomed. From every grade these creative bits are gathered and the loveliest are said or sung or played or danced before the May Queen who crowns each with a spring wreath or bestows a rose as symbol of appreciation.

The following is a typical May-Day program rather than a program of any specific year and gives the order of exercises, the stage pictures, and such creative offerings as have been presented at various times to the May Queen. Although the form is more or less fixed the offerings are so different that they give variety and freshness to each program.

March

Entrance of the school

Bugle call

Queen's march

Queen's procession (*consisting of Seniors and very little children*).

(*Order of procession: trumpeter, flag bearer, Lord-of-the-May, maids-of-honor, crown and sceptre bearers, Queen, ladies-in-waiting, spade and tree bearers, gentlemen-in-waiting.*)

(*When seated, the trumpeter recites Milton's "Song on May Morning."*)

LORD-OF-THE-MAY.

"Our foremost joy on this merry day

Is to crown our chosen Queen of May."

(*Child attending the Queen recites Shakespeare's "Hark! Hark! the Lark." Queen rises, goes to center stage. All the people on the stage rise.*)

LORD-OF-THE-MAY. The Lord-of-the-May presents you crown and sceptre, and hails you fair Regent-of-the-May.

(*The Queen is crowned with flowers and given a calla lily for a sceptre.*)

LORD-OF-THE-MAY. Ascend your throne. (*Turning to the audience.*)

Salute your Queen.

(*School rises and sings, "Hail to Thee and Salutation." For words and music, see p. 154. Lord-of-the-May signals all to be seated.*)

QUEEN (*seated on her throne*).

"How sweet a thing it is to wear a crown,
Within whose circuit is Elysium,
And all that poets feign of bliss and joy."

How can I thank you for the honor you bestow
Indeed,

"You have bereft me of all words,
Only my blood speaks to you in my veins;"

"Where every something, being blent together,
Turns to a wild of nothing save of joy,
Expressed and not expressed."

This only can I say,

"I wish you all the joy that you can wish."

LORD-OF-THE-MAY. Come, now a roundel and a merry song.

(*"The Rounds, The Spring Has Come," Hayes; "Come Let Us All A-Maying Go," Hilton, are sung by the school.*)

THE MORNING EXERCISE

LORD-OF-THE-MAY.

"Proud-pied May, dressed in all his trim
Hath put a spirit of youth in everything."

Let the dancers come before the queen.

"Foot it featly here and there."

(A group of the younger children give an original interpretative dance.)

LORD-OF-THE-MAY.

"The poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The form of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name."

For the Queen's delight, let the poets present their offerings,
(Poets beginning with the youngest grades and continuing through the high school in groups say their poems.)

LORD-OF-THE-MAY. Musicians, come Ho!

"Let the sound of music creep in our ears,
Touches of sweet harmony."

"As full of spirit as the month of May
And gorgeous as the sun of midsummer."

Several songs, two improvisations, a violin melody and a duet for violin and cello composed by individual or groups of children followed.

QUEEN. No Queen of May was ever more blessed with gifted subjects.
Merely to say this is to render you the beggarly thanks.

I am asking the maids-of-honor to give to each of those who has created a poem, a dance or melody, a flower in memory of this happy day.

LORD-OF-THE-MAY. More matter for a May morning.

It has long been the custom on May Day to plant vines, shrubs, or trees about our school. Let us hear some of the wishes which have been made for the dogwood, which is about to be planted. All other wishes have been burned and their ashes, which are in this urn, will be placed at the roots of the tree to stimulate its growth.

(Boys of the senior class read the wishes written by each grade.)

LORD-OF-THE-MAY. Our revels here are ended. Let us now proceed to the garden

"Where the joyous book of Spring
Lies open writ in blossoms."

RECESSIONAL.

Texts of some of the original poems and musical compositions are given to indicate the type of material which makes up a May-Day program. As a background of the preparation in musical composition which lies behind the final program Miss Goodrich gives a picture in the following:

The interest in writing melodies to be presented to the Queen is often keen, especially among those who have already tried it. It is of course

voluntary work. Two or three congenial girls make a very good working group. Some must work alone. A few make their tunes at home and bring them to the teacher ready to sing, and even written out more or less accurately.

We have made a small collection of lyrics for the use of our budding song-makers. This little booklet contains some of the finest English short poems, some less fine but good as texts; also poems by pupils on various subjects, including prose poems of former years which are regular in form.

So then the song-makers begin. They may go with a teacher to the group-room and sing their melodies to her, or work in some quiet corner alone. The teacher's function is to write the phrases as they present themselves, and when the song is finished to have it sung until the children are perfectly familiar with it and can keep it in mind as a whole. After the song is finished, a simple accompaniment is usually supplied by the teacher, subject to the taste of the composer.

The next step is for the song to be written on the board in the music room. It is sung by the composers and is learned quickly by the rest of the class. Then begins the stage of criticism. A fairly solemn air pervades the group. Tentative suggestions begin to come: "I like it," "It fits the words," "It has a monotonous rhythm," "It seems to be too much like"—another tune. A failure in the coherence of the melodic line is always noticed, or the lack of a climax, or of a satisfying close.

The great point in directing this song-making is, in our opinion, a process of clearing obstructions away. Timidity and self-consciousness are to be overcome, vague and uncertain criticisms are to be interpreted, some light is to be let into questions of form, and there is need of help in the final rendering of the song by the class. This is always subject to the taste and feeling of the composer. The places at which suggestion and criticism shall come from the teacher are impossible to state. They depend largely upon our knowledge of the pupil.

It may be added that though the interest and joy in these songs are often intense, no unhealthy self-satisfaction is encountered in the children. The teacher's reserved pleasure in a song may be quite overborne by the fervid admiration of the group for it, but a little calm analysis restores the balance. In a few cases a child may need unreserved praise, but usually we think a somewhat tempered expression of pleasure is most useful. The little songs are, in some cases, of the sort that sound better than they really are to the uninitiated audience.¹

¹ Helen Goodrich, "The Creative Aspect of a May-Day Festival," *Progressive Education* (Jan.-Feb.-Mar., 1927), p. 36.

THE MORNING EXERCISE

HAIL TO THEE AND SALUTATION

Composed by 9th grade girls, 1925, ½ period

Hail to thee, Hail to thee and sal - u - ta - tion, Glo - rious Queen of May, We give thee joyous
greeting Up on this blithe day. Hail to thee hail to thee and sal - u - ta - tion.

SONG OF SPRING

The roofs are shining from the rain, the sparrows twitter on the ground, there is no sign of
Spring To day, Save that it sings to me —

These words with the music were composed by a sixth-grade child.

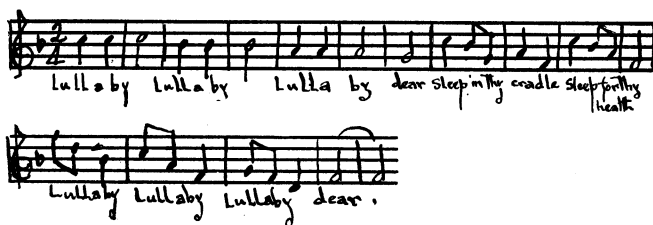
THIRD GRADE SONG, TO THE LILY

This poem was written by one child in the third grade when a calla lily bulb which they had planted was brought in from the garden ready to bloom. The whole grade wrote the tune for these words.

Oh! Li - ly bulb and beautiful with leaves so wide and green, What do you do all day? My stately garden
queen, My stately garden queen.

SECOND GRADE LULLABY

This poem was written and set to music by a second-grade group of children when dolls had been brought from home to enjoy with other children in morning exercises.



VIOLIN MELODY

Doris Lackritz, Frances Weinsheimer, 8th Grade, 1927



The verse recited by pupils as original with them is original to the best of our belief. For most children, verse can become a natural mode of expression. We try to give them rich association with poetry of all kinds, and we refrain, deliberately, from emphasizing the analysis of formal technique in the study of poetic literature. We cherish all honest attempts to express sincere feeling appropriately in rhythmical phrase, and we enjoy our poetic product without exaggerating either its merit or its ultimate worth. It is in this spirit that we invite you to enjoy it with us.—PROGRAM NOTES BY ENGLISH DEPARTMENT.

SPRING

Now that spring has come again
Play with bird and joy with flowers,
Climb the trees and wake the leaves,
Now that spring has come again.

CREIGH, First Grade

When the leaves are peeping
Out of their snug warm houses,
And the grass is coming out of the earth,
And the birds are singing from the trees,
And it's time you should be at perfect ease—
Come unto this bench under the trees.
Look at the large open sky—
I can see a butterfly.
Kites are flying overhead,
Birds are flying around,
Muttering, nesting, hopping—everywhere.

MARY, Second Grade

THE MORNING EXERCISE

POEM

Spring comes on
 Like a little rippling wave.
 Like Hermes as he mounts the azure skies.
 With all the gentleness of our sweet queen,
 It comes.

JOHN H., Fourth Grade

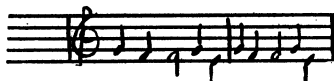
POEM

No pleading sounds are heard for showers,
 No flowers are lying asleep waiting for spring;
 The moon is not dreaming but sheds her silver;
 The cherishing spring is here.

MARCELLE, Fourth Grade

FROM DAWN TO DUSK

When morning stirs and the lone owl calls,
 "Tis time to sleep, 'tis time to sleep,"
 The whippoorwill slowly ends his weird song,
 The notes of the oriole ring out clear and strong,
 The forest wakes.
 The finch, the thrush, the bob-o-link, are all telling
 Of their long trip over seas and forests
 And their gay winter in the sunny land.
 Last of all, the melody of the vesper sparrow,
 As she sings the others to sleep,
 Comes through the forest.



The sun hides his face in darkness
 As night falls.

Joy, Fifth Grade

POEM

The golden sunlight filled the room,
 The golden sun of May,
 Carrying the breath of Spring
 To all that sleeping lay,

To purple violets slumbering
 In a china bowl,
 A message from a distant wood
 From brothers on a knoll.

A message of good cheer it brought,
 Of love and hope and May,
 To cheer imprisoned violets
 That sweetly sleeping lay.

MARJORIE, Eighth Grade

POEM

When heat comes and goes like little puffs of wind
And rain falls in light, clear sheets,
Yet with enough force to push forth little shoots of green,
And everything has ambition, even to the smallest blade—
Then it is spring.

HELEN, Tenth Grade

POEM

April, lovely child, in soft wet rags,
With tears a-glistening on thy tender cheek,
And eyes like calm, still pools,
Fringed about with dark dew-spangled lashes,
Whence comest thou, thou winsome wench,
Now throwing apple blossoms to the wind,
And now
Stopping to weep within a soft, deep cloud?

JEAN, Eleventh Grade